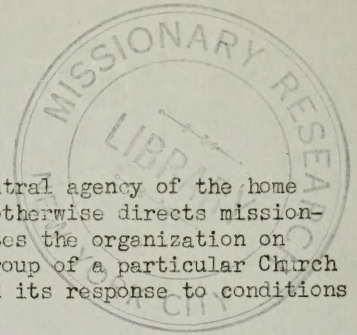


THE FORMING OF MISSIONARY POLICY

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In this paper "Board" is used to describe any central agency of the home Church which receives and distributes missionary money or otherwise directs missionary work on the foreign field. The word "Mission" designates the organization on the field which contains or is made up of the missionary group of a particular Church or Board. "Policies" are the procedures of the Mission and its response to conditions which it finds or which develop.

Three possibilities appear for the creation and development of these policies: They are made (a) by the Board; (b) by the Mission; (c) by the two together. There remains the possibility that the Mission may proceed without real policies, acting opportunely, with no foresight for the future, and that the Board may move in the same way, careless of any stable plans or processes.

- I -

(1) The Board may be under the influence of certain groups in its constituency and, knowing their desires and hopes, it may hold the Mission to plans which serve those ends, whether the Mission independently would follow such policies or not. The Mission may be under the influence of strong personalities in its own ranks or under pressure from local forces and insist upon courses which the Board would not desire.

(2) The Board is apt to take a far wider view of the whole field than the particular Mission and to have a clearer mind on dangers and values easily overlooked in the midst of a field service. The Mission, on the other hand, is close to the real situation and knows what is possible and feasible and what is not, knows how the particular field differs from other fields with which the Board may be mistakenly comparing it.

(3) Boards tend to abdicate any supposed authority in favor of the Missions; the Mission tends to hold the Board accountable for decisions which are difficult or complicating in its own life.

(4) Boards will differ according to the constitution of the bodies which they represent in the home Church. Closely organized Churches are apt to keep a somewhat firmer hand on Missions than more loosely organized Churches. Some Boards determine details which other Boards could not determine. The autonomy of the Mission is much more marked in some Churches than in others. The tendency is toward Mission autonomy.

(a) Limits on this autonomy lie partly in the fact that the Board must supply the funds necessary for most of the work, and it naturally demands a voice in any new enterprise or in any advance program which will become permanent and will require added or continued men and money.

(b) Moreover, the Board is compelled to take into account the entire range of its work, while the Mission properly thinks chiefly of that section of it with which it is immediately concerned. This sets a limit on appropriations and appointments, whatever the Mission may desire.

(c) The Board is apt to see more clearly the future in the large and to observe omissions or over accents in the policy of the Mission.

(d) The Board is ordinarily held accountable by its constituency for providing as wisely and abundantly as possible for the Mission and to prevent both waste and limitation. Some Boards are held strictly accountable also for the continuance of the Religious soundness of the Mission. Field policies of cooperation or union are considered the work of the Board and it is blamed if these policies are not acceptable.

(5) In no case is the Mission the servant of or subject to the Board. Neither is the Board a negligible element in the life of the Mission. Its hand is often restraining but it is often also impelling, though the Mission is apt to have more plans for advancement than the Board can support and hence the negatives of the Board are apt to be common. At the same time it is through the Board that the Mission has its clearest sense of the home constituency upon which it depends for further supplies. These supplies are not the gift of the Board but they are administered by the constituency through the Board and are determined in large part according to the wisdom of the Board.

- II -

(6) It seems clear that neither the Board nor the Mission can properly abdicate its responsibility for making and executing wise policies on the field. Opportunism is the path of easy movement. There are always reasons for going on with what is being done; ending it is difficult and always involves a certain amount of sacrifice. Nothing that is attempted by good men is ever wholly useless or injurious. It is always good in some sense and because it is good it may be the enemy of the best. A Board seldom has to call a Mission to correct a positive evil. A Board may insist upon the wrong thing because it is according to some preconceived or widely-experienced plan, or a Mission may insist upon it because of dominating personalities committed to it or because it has been so long part of their policy that a change seems injurious.

(7) There must be included also the element of experimentation in actual field work. Some things have to be tried and given time enough to justify or condemn themselves. Seldom is anything an unmitigated failure or an unqualified success in the opinion of all observers. A Board may be influenced by the judgment of individual members of the Mission, and if these members are forceful, they may honestly differ about a given element in the program. This forces decision by the Board or by the Mission. What started as an experiment has generally become a settled and accepted part of the work by the time a decision has to be made regarding it. If the Board decides against it because of adverse elements, the Mission may favor it because of its favorable elements, or vice versa. Each knows that best work is done in the spirit of harmony and therefore each dislikes to take a course not approved by the other. When a Board has lost the confidence of a Mission, or when a Mission involves the Board in a piece of bad judgment, the work of each is more difficult and good work may become impossible. For this reason Board and Mission tend to excess of caution, except as dominating personalities in either group rule its actions.

(8) For many reasons, also, the Board is a more permanent feature of the situation than the Mission. The personnel of the Mission is apt to change more

rapidly than that of the Board, though individual missionaries may outlive several generations of Board members. The Board is a continuing agency, independently of the Mission, while the Mission continues through the activity and appointment of the Board. This tends to make the Board feel its responsibility for policies more strongly than the Mission. If the Mission breaks down at any point, the blow is apt to come soon or late on the Board, and on the other hand a mistaken policy of the Board regarding the home Church is apt to come soon or late on the Mission. If the Board makes a wrong decision on a field matter and wreckage must be recovered, the Mission may fairly require help from the Board. If the Mission makes such a mistake, the salvage must be accomplished also through the help of the Board because the Mission cannot be left to do the impossible. The Mission may feel this at times so that it loses the element of caution, knowing that in the pinch the Board will not, dare not, desert it. On the other hand, the Board may move with undue caution because it knows that the ultimate burden will fall on it in case of failure or mistake.

(9) The Board ought to be able to think in terms of a changed world situation whereas a Mission will think in terms of that change only as it can be seen in its own borders. The Board ought to foresee what the next decade will demand because it can observe movements in other lands farther along in the development. It may therefore require a policy of preparation whose reasons the Mission may not appreciate.

(10) It must be frankly said that too much mission work is without a policy. There are schools because there always have been schools; hospitals because they are so helpful; rural enterprises because rural work is neglected. But whether these schools are still needed in the same places and with the same plans, whether the hospitals can any longer make the same appeal as before, whether the rural enterprise is well placed and well conducted, no one really knows nor inquires. It has long been there and precious lives have gone into it and honored workers are engaged in it,--how shall it be changed? Is not the result still needed? Whether the work is absorbing personnel and fund needed more in some other line, whether the output is justifying the strain, whether change in national policies has outmoded the procedure, no one carefully asks. Most Boards nominally require this to be done at stated intervals, but they are apt to be the worst sinners themselves in this regard, not alone in their own methods but in their survey of the work of the field. Good men believe in what they are doing; they want any policy to include their piece of work. If they are forceful men as well as good, they can swing most Missions; Boards move with caution regarding them.

(11) There ought to stand over against every detail of mission policy a large WHY? Is the continuance of this or that bit of work really justified? If so, by what? Have any changes occurred in the surroundings which ought to modify the procedure? Ought we still to be doing this, maintaining this institution, this process? There is no merit in mere iconoclasm, some old features of work ought to continue to the end. But there is no merit in mere conservatism, which accepts the status quo as having value in itself.

- III -

Out of this jumble of possibilities and experience five facts emerge:

1. Opportunism is an unwise method of mission work. There will always be an element of it in any deliberate program. Like Saul, the work goes to a certain place and then waits to see what the Lord will require. (I Sam. 10:7). But one never stumbles on the policy of wisdom when one is not seeking something. Board and Mission ought to have a policy,--to know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what is the place in it of the details of procedure.

2. This policy needs to be surveyed with fresh concern from time to time, in order to ensure that the objective is still in sight or is altered if it is no longer valid, and in order to slough off procedures which are outdated and ineffective and to introduce neglected elements in the policy. This requires courage and self-sacrifice,--courage to undertake unaccustomed things, self-sacrifice to let familiar things go.

3. In the forming of the policy Board and Mission cooperate, the Board supplying the larger outlines of essential procedure, the Mission supplying details and immediate methods. The Board keeps the main objectives constantly before the Mission and watches carefully whether the details are directed toward it; the Mission supplies the Board with knowledge of the ways in which the objectives can be approached.

4. The final responsibility for the existence of a missionary policy lies with the Board. The bewildering details of actual field service prevent clear vision of the whole program for most Missions. The Board can offer a directing hand, though never an oppressive and burdensome one.

5. The Mission has the responsibility for maintaining a sound policy in the particular fields keeping in sight the objective and receiving from time to time the suggestions of the Board regarding the appearance of the work and the possibilities of its improvement. Both Board and Mission will realize that anything that seems clear to itself can be made clear to the other party to the work, and that neither can require of the other what seems to it a betrayal of the trust committed to it.

December 1933